

PAPER AGAINST GOLD.

For the use of Schools and of Young Persons in general.

The Numbers of this Work (price 2d. each) succeed each other regularly every week.—If Mr. VANSITTART will lay out a few *two-pences*, he will find them turn to a better account than the *nostrums* that the quacks in finance are now urging him to adopt for the purpose of reviving manufactures and agriculture.—The Week after next will be published the first Number of Cobbett's Parliamentary Register, price Two-pence.—It will contain about 20 Numbers for the Session.

TO THE
PEOPLE OF HAMPSHIRE.

On the Reports made to Parliament.—On the Habeas Corpus Suspension.—On the Sedition Bills and Treason Bills.—On the state to which we are reduced.

London, March 5, 1817.

MY GOOD NEIGHBOURS,

Yesterday the act passed the Royal Assent! It is now a *law*; and to this law we must now submit! For many, many years, I have been warning my country against the measures, which have finally brought us to this pass; and, those among you, who have been in the habit of attending the Meetings

at Winchester, will remember how the greater part of the farmers and of all those who seemed to be in rather higher life than the rest used to scoff at me, when I foretold to you all what would be the end of the things which I used to complain of.—Those persons must now begin to feel some degree of alarm and shame; but this feeling comes too late.

I have no scruple to say, that this is the most important event that has taken place in the world for hundreds of years; because it changes, in the most important part, the state of this nation, which is, and long has been, of greater consequence than any other nation. The event itself being so awfully important, you, and every Englishman ought to know what has produced it. When our children's children shall read of this event, they will be all anxiety to know what was the cause of it; what was the cause of putting, for several months at the least, the *Personal Safety of every man*, however innocent he may be, within the *absolute power* of a Secretary of State, or of Six Privy Councillors.

This measure was proposed to the two Houses, in consequence of a Report to each House, made by a *Secret Committee of each House*, and these

Reports were made upon certain *evidence*, produced to those *Secret Committees*. The progress of the proceedings, in the House of Commons, for instance, was as follows:—

1. The Prince, in his speech, speaks of *designing* and *evil-minded* men, who are endeavouring to *seduce* the people into unlawful acts; and he expresses his confidence, that Parliament will cordially *co-operate* with him in suppressing this evil.
2. The Ministers bring, by the Prince's order, a *Bag*, containing a parcel of papers, which, they say, prove that there is a *design* to make a revolution and *destroy* the government; and upon this they moved for a *Secret Committee* to inquire into the contents of the *Bag*, and to make a Report to the whole House upon the subject, and to say *what ought* to be done in consequence of those contents.
3. The Committee was appointed in this way: It was to consist of *twenty-one members*. Each member of the House put 21 names upon a bit of paper, and then put that paper into a glass, or box. Then the whole of the papers are taken out, and the 21 men, whose names are upon the greatest number of bits of paper, are the Committee! So you see, that on whichever side the ma-

jority of the House is, that side must have the choosing of the Committee. This is called choosing by *ballot*; but, what people in general think about *ballot* is, that *the names of all the Members in the House are put into a glass, or box, and then the first twenty-one, taken out promiscuously, like a jury, are the Committee*. You see, that this is no such a thing; and, indeed, it was so well known *who* would be the members of the Committee, that Mr. Brougham actually read the 21 names to the House *before the papers were put into the box*.

4. This was the Committee, to whom the papers were referred. They assembled, looked at the contents of the *Bag*, which contents had been collected by the ministers.
5. They made a *Report*; that is to say, they drew up an account, founded on these papers, and laid it before the House. And, in both Houses of Parliament, the Report concludes with stating, that the *Laws, as they now stand, are not sufficient to preserve the peace of the country*.
6. The Ministers come and propose *new laws*; one to make it *death* to attempt to seduce either soldiers or sailors from their duty; another to make it *treason* to do certain acts relative to the endangering the person of the

Prince Regent; another to prevent public meetings unless under new regulations, and for checking the circulation of certain pamphlets, &c; and another, which is the *all-in-all*, for suspending the Habeas Corpus Act, and, thereby, putting every man's *person* in the power of the Ministers, to enable them to shut it up *at their absolute pleasure*, without any limit whatever, except that the Act, as it now stands, is to last only till *July next*; but, this Act may be *renewed* before July next, and, that it *will* be renewed, who can doubt? For, can the country possibly be *more quiet then* than it is *now*?

After this brief history of the proceedings, which have more immediately led to this shocking state of things, it will only be necessary to insert the Reports themselves, in order to enable you to form a correct judgment as to the grounds of the laws that have been passed. These Reports are *immortal documents*.—They should be read by you all, and preserved as you would preserve your eye-sight. Read them over and over again; put them by, and then take them out again. How you, my good neighbours, and all the people of England, will be surprised to find, that, upon these Reports of Committees formed as above described,

and without *any evidence of any sort* submitted to *their own inspection*, the two Houses have, by vast majorities, proceeded to take away even our *personal safety*, and to make it possible for any man, however innocent, to be taken out of his bed and carried away to a prison, without any *hearing even* before the Secretary of State who shall sign the warrant for his imprisonment.

In order to rouse the nation to make all the legal efforts in their power to obtain a repeal of this terrible law of *suspension*, the first thing is to make them *clearly* understand the grounds on which it has been passed; to make them see the *alleged* grounds, and to enable them to form an opinion as to the *real* grounds. When that is done, they will have the matter full in their minds; and they will see what it is that has produced the evil.

It is said that the Habeas Corpus Act has been suspended before, so that this is *no new thing*. This, therefore, is a point of great moment. The Act has been suspended *before*; but, under what circumstances? It was suspended in the reign of George I. when there was a Pretender to the Throne living in France, and supported by the king of France, and when there were many powerful men in England who were plotting with that Pretender to bring him over, and to put down the Family then upon the throne. Were these circumstances like those of the

present day? A French army was then in readiness to come over to assist that Pretender, and it was very well known, that many men, and men of weight too, were *ready to join that French army*. It was, therefore, necessary to give great powers to the government in order that they might, upon any sudden emergency, lay hold of any man suspected of a design to aid in such an enterprize; because, if suffered to remain at large, he might join the enemy and greatly add to the danger and the bloodshed. But, does any such cause of fear exist now? We are at peace, and in close alliance, with all the kings of Europe; their subjects are all in a state of quiet submissiion; there is no Pretender; no man at home, who has any weight at all, proposes, or even hints at, any change in the established things of the country; there has been no attempt of any sort to effect Reform by violence; and, therefore, there is no sort of resemblance in the circumstances of the two cases.

In the reign of George II. the Habeas Corpus Act was suspended; but then, not only was there a Pretender living in France and encouraged and supported by the king of France, but he actually landed in Scotland, was joined by large numbers and by several noblemen, marched towards London at the head of an army, and got as far as Carlisle. Under such circumstances it was the duty of the Par-

liament to empower the Ministers to seize and keep safe persons suspected of a design to join the enemy. But, to attempt to justify the suspension now, because a suspension took place then, would be like proposing to cut off a man's arm on account of a pin-scratch upon his finger, because a man's arm had once been cut off on account of a mortification of his hand.

The act was suspended during the first war against the French Revolutionists. But, at that time, we were at war with a very populous and powerful nation, who had destroyed their Church and Nobility, put their king to death, declared their country to be a Republic, and had offered their assistance to any other oppressed people to enable them to do the same in their country. This was denied to aim at England; but, at any rate, there was this *pretence*. Then it is certainly true, that delegates from Societies in England had gone to, and been received by, the French Convention. This was another *pretence*. It is also certain, that, in many publications and speeches it was openly avowed, that it would be desirable to erect a Republic in England. Most men of liberal minds opposed most strenuously the suspension even *then*. Yet taking into view only the circumstance of war, and the character of the enemy, and supposing no Republican design to have really existed; taking the

matter in this light, how *very different* are the two cases! Not only are we at peace now with all the world; but a war is almost impossible. Not only are the French *not republicans*, but they are become *Royalists* after having tried Republicanism, and we are daily and hourly told, that they are happy under their return to a kingly government; and, so far from their king being *our enemy*, he is *our friend and ally*. Not only have we nothing from without to encourage any body here to think of a change in the form of government; but the very men, who, through the press, justify this suspension of our liberties and even our *Personal Safety*, tell us, in the same breath, that we live under a government, which is the *admiration* and *envy* of the world!

Therefore if I were to allow, which I do not, that the *suspension* was justifiable during the war against the French Republicans, I should for the very same reasons, amongst many others, deny that it was justifiable now. Thus then, the assertion, that the suspension is *not a new thing* is all sophistry; it is a base attempt to deceive the people, to blind them, to hush their well-grounded fears, and to reconcile them to a measure, which, if it remain any considerable time in force, must, as every one must see, be the cause of endless misery and degradation.

I am well aware, that there are peo-

ple enough to say: "What is the "Suspension of the Habeas Corpus" "Act to me? I am on the side of "the Ministers; or, I never meddle "with politics. I shall be as safe as "if the act had never passed. The "act will be a dead letter as far as "relates to me." So it will, perhaps, as to *direct effect*; and it certainly will be so far as relates to horses, oxen, mules, asses, hogs, dogs, cats, poultry, fish, posts and stones; but, the man, who does not perceive, that this act will affect him indirectly, and who does not feel pain and shame at seeing it passed under the present circumstances, is, in the scale of animal life, far inferior in merit to a horse or a dog. The truth is, that every man, be he who or what he may, unless selfishness has made him a brute, does feel deep sorrow and shame upon this occasion; and, these miserable pretences of being contented under this state of things, and of not being affected by it, arise out of a desire to hide the pain and shame that they feel; to hide the feeling from their neighbours, and, if it were possible, from themselves; just as we always hear men endeavour to console themselves for the loss of things which they see no prospect of preserving or regaining; though the very same things had been but a little while before the pride and the happiness of their lives. This pretence, however, will become every day more *fashionable*. To af-

fect to despise the Personal Safety Law will be as much in fashion as it is amongst cast off lovers to affect to despise their former sweet-hearts; and, in a very short time, if the suspension act be permitted to continue in force, we shall hear it applauded as a *lucky measure*, just as we did the stoppage of cash-payments at the Bank, which, for a little while, was regarded as the most ruinous measure that ever was adopted, and which, now, it has proved to be, that measure being *the great cause* of all the present miseries, and even of these last fatal measures of restraint.--- When that measure was first adopted, it was only for *six weeks*; then for *three months*; then for *a year*! then to the *end of the war*; then for the *first year of peace*; then for *one more year*; then for the *new war*; then for *a year of peace*; and now for *two years*: and thus it has already gone on for *twenty years*! And, if the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act be suffered to be renewed but *once*; if it be not repealed indeed almost immediately, what hope can any man of sense entertain, that it will *ever be repealed*? Can the country ever be *more quiet* than it is now? Can it be *more prosperous* and less *miserable* as long as the funding system to its present extent shall last? Will commerce, manufactures, and agriculture revive under that load which has crushed them to pieces?

When, then, if not *now*, is this act *ever* to be repealed? It has been passed in a time of *profound peace*; it cannot be denied that the patience of the people has been unparalleled; they have met in immense multitudes all over the kingdom to petition; they have been guilty of no outrages, no breaches of the peace; goaded and provoked in all sorts of ways, they have made no attacks on the persons or the property of the rich; and, if the act be called for *now*, when, I again ask, is it to cease? *When* is to come the time, when it will not be called for, and when there will not be found persons to justify its continuance?

Let no one, therefore, deceive himself with the expectation of a return from this path at *some future time*. The Petitions for a *repeal* must be sent up *now or never*. It will be a striking fact in history, that, on the very night that this Bill made its last appearance in the House of Commons, there lay upon the floor of that House, nearly *six hundred petitions* signed by *one million and sixty thousand men*, praying for *Parliamentary Reform*. They had been carried down in *Hackney Coaches*, and had been carried in by Sir Francis Burdett and Lord Cochrane; and when the two Masters in Chancery came in to announce that the Lords had finished the Bill, they were unable to approach the table, the whole space of several

yards, from the Bar to the Table, being filled with this immense heap of Petitions! There had been petitions, with several *hundred thousand* names, presented before, and praying for the same thing; and Sir Francis Burdett, when the Bill came down from the Lords, emphatically observed, "That Bill is the *answer* to these Petitions;" an observation which History will not forget in recording the occurrences of these disgraceful times. I believe, that, in the whole, more than *one million and a half of men* have signed Petitions for Parliamentary Reform, upon the principles of *Annual Parliaments* and *Universal Suffrage*; and, this has been done in the most fair and open manner. In the 11 millions, or thereabouts, of the natives of England and Scotland, there cannot be more than about two millions of active, sturdy men. However, suppose the *families* to be *two millions and a half*, and that there be *one active man* to each family, a *majority* of the active men of the nation have petitioned upon this occasion, notwithstanding all the efforts that have been made to prevent petitioning. But, the truth is, that a considerable part of the petitions are not yet come in; and, if no measures of prevention, no menaces, no *undue influence*, had been made use of, there would, I am convinced, have been *nine tenths* of the names of *all the men in the country* to these petitions.

This, therefore, is THE PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE. Let our adversaries say or do what they will, this is the PEOPLE'S PRAYER; and, though Corruption may call it an attempt to overthrow the Constitution, this prayer, I am fully convinced, will be *finally* heard. I, for my part, as far as I have power, will always contend for this as our *right*. We have by reference to *law* and by an appeal to *reason*, proved it to be our right; and, we have received *no answer*.

It was my intention to enter here into a description of the *other Bills* that are now passing; but, I have not room in this Number, and it is absolutely necessary to publish the *Reports*, because we are now entering upon a *new sort of rule*, and the time will come when we shall have to refer to the sources from whence it has sprung. Keep this Number, I beg of you; for we shall often have to speak of it. In entering upon this new state of things, we ought first to trace the *causes of it*, and then to get at a clear notion of *what it is*. This we shall do in the course of the *Next Number*; and then we shall have to make all the legal exertions in our power to get rid of this deep disgrace on ourselves and our country.

I am your friend,

W.M. COBBETT

REPORT by the LORDS COMMITTEES appointed a Secret Committee to inquire into certain Meetings and Combinations endangering the Public Tranquillity, and to report to the House as they shall see Occasion:

Ordered to Report,

That the Committee have met, and have proceeded in the examination of the papers referred to them.

Their attention was in the first instance directed to those which relate to the metropolis; and they have found therein such evidence as leaves no doubt in their minds that a traitorous conspiracy has been formed in the metropolis for the purpose of overthrowing, by means of a general insurrection, the established Government, Laws, and Constitution of this Kingdom, and of effecting a general plunder and division of property.

In the last autumn various consultations were held by persons in the metropolis engaged in this conspiracy. Different measures of the most extensive and dangerous nature were resolved upon; partial preparations were made for their execution, and various plans were discussed for collecting a force sufficient for that purpose. But at a subsequent consultation another plan was adopted, which was, to get a great number of men together to see what force could be raised; and it was agreed that the best way to get them together would be to call a public meeting.—Spa Fields was fixed upon as the place affording the greatest facilities for entering the town, and attacking the most important points in the city. In pursuance of this design, and in order to assemble in the neighbourhood of London a great number of the poorer classes of the community, and particularly of those in whose minds the pressure of the times might be supposed to have excited disaffection and discontent, advertisements were inserted in newspapers, and hand-

bills were industriously distributed, inviting the distressed manufacturers, mariners, artizans, and others to assemble at that place on the 15th of November. A large body of people accordingly assembled at the time and place prescribed. The most inflammatory language was there held to the multitude, having a direct tendency to excite them to outrage and violence; and the meeting was in fact followed by some acts of plunder and riot. A petition to His Royal Highness the Prince Regent was agreed to at that meeting, and an adjournment to Palace Yard on the first day after the meeting of Parliament was proposed; but the second of December was subsequently fixed upon (on the proposition of one of the persons concerned in the plans already described) for another meeting in Spa Fields; and that day appears to have been determined upon for the execution of their design.

Various schemes were formed for this purpose; amongst them was a general and forcible liberation of all persons confined in the different prisons in the metropolis; into some of which, in order to facilitate its execution, an address to the prisoners was introduced, assuring them that their liberty would be restored under a new Government; announcing the intended attack upon all the prisons for that day; apprizing the prisoners that arms would be ready for them; exhorting them to be prepared with the national tri-color cockade, and to co-operate by the most violent and sanguinary means to ensure success.

It was also proposed to set fire to various Barracks, and steps were taken to ascertain and prepare the means of effecting this purpose. An attack upon the Tower and the Bank, and other points of importance, was, after previous consultations, finally determined upon. Pikes and Arms to a certain extent were actually provided, and leaders were named, among whom the points of attack were distributed. It further appears that the interval between the two meetings was employed with un-

remitting assiduity by some of the most active agitators in taking regular circuits through different quarters of the town. In these they either resorted to the established clubs or societies, or laboured in conversations, apparently casual, at public houses, to work up the minds of those with whom they conversed into such a state of ferment and irritation as to render them, when collected in sufficient numbers, for whatever ostensible purpose, the fit and ready instruments for the execution of any project, however rash and desperate. In the course of these circuits one of their chief objects appears to have been to take every opportunity of attempting to seduce from their allegiance the Soldiers of the different Guard and at the Barracks. The principal persons concerned in this plan actually proceeded to Spa Fields on the second of December, some of them with concealed arms, and with ammunition previously prepared; they had also provided themselves with tri-color flags, and with a standard bearing the following inscription: "The brave Soldiers are our Brothers; treat them kindly;" and also with tri-colour cockades, evidently adopted as the signal of revolution. After much inflammatory language, a direct invitation was by one of these persons addressed to the multitude to proceed immediately to actual insurrection: and it appears quite certain, that the acts of plunder which were perpetrated for the purpose of procuring arms, and the other measures of open insurrection which followed, were not accidental or unpremeditated, but had been deliberately preconcerted, as parts of a general plan of rebellion and revolution. There appears also strong reason to believe that the execution of those projects at that particular time was expected by some of the associations in distant parts of the country. The conspirators seem to have had the fullest confidence of success; and a persuasion has subsequently been expressed amongst them, that their plans could have been defeated only by casual and un-

expected circumstances. Even after the failure of this attempt, the same plans appear not to have been abandoned.

Your Committee are deeply concerned to be compelled, in further execution of their duty, to report their full conviction that designs of this nature have not been confined to the capital, but have been extended and are still extending widely in many other parts of Great Britain, particularly in some of the most populous and manufacturing districts.

At the meeting of the 2d of December in Spa-fields, that part of the assembly which had not engaged in the acts of plunder and insurrection before mentioned, came to a resolution to adjourn the meeting to the second Monday after the Meeting of Parliament, namely, the 10th of February; and it appears by the papers referred to the Committee, that meetings in various parts of the country, conformably to a plan settled by the leading persons in London at an early period, were intended to be held on the same day.

It appears manifest that the persons engaged in various parts, both of England and Scotland, in forwarding the plans of Revolution, have constantly waited for the example of the metropolis. Intelligence of the event of the meeting there on the 2d of December was anxiously expected; and as the first report of the beginning of the disturbance excited in a high degree the spirits of the disaffected, so its speedy suppression produced the expression of strong feelings of disappointment. Had it even partially succeeded, there seems much reason to believe that it would have been the signal for a more general rising in other parts of the kingdom. Since that time it appears to be the prevailing impression amongst the leading malcontents in the country, that it is expedient for them to wait till the whole kingdom shall (according to their expression) be more completely organized, and more ripe for action.

What is meant by completely organizing

the country is but too evident from the papers before the committee. It appears clearly that the object is, by means of societies or clubs, established or to be established in all parts of Great Britain under pretence of Parliamentary Reform, to infect the minds of all classes of the community, and particularly of those whose situation most exposes them to such impressions, with a spirit of discontent and disaffection, of insubordination, and contempt of all law, religion, and morality, and to hold out to them the plunder and division of all property, as the main object of their efforts, and the restoration of their natural rights; and no endeavours are omitted to prepare them to take up arms on the first signal for accomplishing these designs.

It is on these grounds that your Committee have been led to look with particular anxiety to the formation, principles, and conduct of those societies or clubs by which the ends of the disaffected have been hitherto so much forwarded, and are expected by them to be finally accomplished. Many of these societies pass under the denomination of Hampden-Clubs. Under this title, societies of very various descriptions appear to have been formed, all professing their object to be Parliamentary Reform. This name and their professions may have induced many persons to become members of such societies who may not be aware of the ultimate intentions of many of their leaders; and the Committee would by no means ascribe to all these societies the same practices and designs which they have found to be but too prevalent amongst a large number of them; but they find that, particularly among the manufacturing and labouring classes, societies of this denomination have been most widely extended, and appear to have become some of the chief instruments of disseminating doctrines, and of preparing for the execution of plans, the most dangerous to the public security and peace.

Others of these Societies are called Union Clubs, professing the same object of Parliamentary Reform, but under these words understanding Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments—projects which evidently involve not any qualified or partial change, but a total subversion of the British Constitution. It appears that there is a London Union Society, and branch Unions corresponding with it, and affiliated to it. Others of these Societies have adopted the name of Spencean Philanthropists; and it was by members of a club of this de-

scription that the plans of the conspirators in London were discussed and prepared for execution.

The principles of these last associations seem to be spreading rapidly among the other Societies which have been formed, and are daily forming, under that and other denominations in the country. Among the persons adopting these principles, it is common to disclaim Parliamentary Reform as unworthy of their attention. Their objects are avowed in a handbill dispersed by the Society of that description in London, and in numerous other publications. These objects are, "a parochial partnership in land, on the principle that the landholders are not proprietors in chief; that they are but the stewards of the public; that the land is the people's farm; that landed monopoly is contrary to the spirit of Christianity, and destructive of the independence and morality of mankind."

The Societies under these different names are so numerous, and so various, that it has been difficult to obtain a complete view of all of them, or to comprehend them under any general description.

The country Societies are principally to be found in and in the neighbourhood of Leicester, Loughborough, Nottingham, Mansfield, Derby, Chesterfield, Sheffield, Blackburn, Manchester, Birmingham, and Norwich, and in Glasgow and its vicinity; but they extend and are spreading, in some parts of the country, to almost every village. In addition to all the arts of seduction, resort is also had to a system of intimidation, and threats are held out to those who refuse to join. Their combinations are artfully contrived to secure secrecy in their proceedings, and to give to the leading members undisputed authority over the rest. Oaths of secrecy have been frequently administered, some of which are of the most atrocious and dreadful import.

They do not, however, trust to this security alone to prevent discovery; their proceedings are seldom reduced to writing; they pass and are communicated by word of mouth. The more numerous Meetings delegate all authority to a managing Committee; and by that Committee, and by Meetings of Delegates from the Committee of different Societies, every thing of importance is transacted.

The Committees themselves are also cautious of reducing any of their proceedings to writing, communicating with each other only by Delegates and Missionaries.

It appears that, in some parts of the Country, arms have been lately procured by individual Members of these Societies in considerable quantities, which can only have been done with a view to the use of force. Subscriptions are also generally required, which although the amount paid by each individual may be very small, may produce, from the large numbers of the contributors, no inconsiderable fund.

The destructive objects which the leading members of these Societies have in view are demonstrated by their publications and by their proceedings, all equally calculated to inflame the minds of the members, and in general of the poorer classes of the community. At the ordinary meetings of these Societies, which are often continued to a late hour, their time is principally employed in listening to speeches tending to the destruction of social order, recommending a general equalization of property, and at the same time endeavouring to corrupt the morals of the hearers, and to destroy all reverence for Religion. The landholder has been represented as a monster which must be hunted down, and the fundholder as a still greater evil; and both have been described as rapacious creatures, who take from the people fifteen pence out of every quarter loaf. They have been told that Parliamentary Reform is no more than a half measure, changing only one set of thieves for another; and that they must go to the land, as nothing short of that would avail them. Another principal employment of their time is to listen to publications of the same description as the speeches, containing the same doctrines, and leading to the same purposes; and the meetings are frequently terminated, particularly in London, by profane and seditious songs and parodies of parts of the Liturgy, in which the responses are chaunted by the whole company. By such means, and by the profession of open infidelity in which some of the members indulge in their speeches, the minds of those who attend their meetings are tainted and depraved; they are taught contempt for all decency, all law, all religion and morality, and are thus prepared for the most atrocious scenes of outrage and violence.

Amongst the most effectual means of furthering these dangerous designs, the Committee think it their duty particularly to call the attention of the House to the unremitting activity which has been employed throughout the kingdom in circu-

lating to an unprecedented extent, at the lowest prices or gratuitously, publications of the most seditious and inflammatory nature, marked with a peculiar character of irreligion and blasphemy, and tending not only to overturn the existing form of government and order of society, but to root out those principles upon which alone any government or any society can be supported.

The Committee cannot but consider the late attack upon His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, on his way from opening the present session of Parliament, as an additional and melancholy proof of the efficacy of this system to destroy all reverence for authority, and all sense of duty, and to expose to insult, indignity, and hazard the person of the immediate representative of the Sovereign, even in the exercise of one of the most important parts of his Royal functions.

It appears to be an essential part of the system to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by public meetings, convoked either by the leaders of these societies, or by others in the metropolis, and in populous places and districts, to address the multitude in terms of unprecedented licence and violence, amounting even in some instances to an open declaration that, in case of non-compliance with their petitions, the Sovereign will have forfeited his claim to their allegiance. These proceedings are subsequently printed and circulated, and thus become a fresh vehicle for sedition and treason.

By the frequency of these meetings and by the new practice of continuing them (under various pretexts) by frequent adjournments, the minds of his Majesty's well-disposed and peaceable subjects are held in a state of perpetual agitation and alarm. The appointment of such public meetings in a variety of different places on the same day, appears to be considered as the most effectual means of accomplishing the designs of the disaffected, and must evidently in a high degree embarrass and impede the exertions of all civil powers applicable to the suppression of disturbances, distract the attention of Government, and oblige them so to subdivide and harrass the military force which it may be necessary to call in for the assistance of the civil power, as to render it inadequate to the maintenance of public tranquillity.

Such a state of things cannot be suffered to continue without hazarding the most imminent and dreadful evils; and al-

though the Committee do not presume to anticipate the decision of Parliament, as to the particular measures to be adopted in the present emergency, they feel it to be their duty to express their decided opinion that further provisions are necessary for the preservation of the public peace, and for the protection of interests in which the happiness of every class of the community is deeply and equally involved.

REPORT of the COMMITTEE of SECRECY, to whom the several PAPERS, which were presented (sealed up) to the House, by Lord Viscount Castlereagh, on the 4th day of February, by Command of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, were referred, and who were directed to examine the Matters thereof, and report the same, as they should appear to them, to the House;—have unanimously agreed to the following Report.

It appears to your Committee, from the most attentive consideration of the several documents referred to them, that attempts have been made, in various parts of the country, as well as in the metropolis, to take advantage of the distress in which the labouring and manufacturing classes of the community are at present involved, to induce them to look for immediate relief, not only in a *Reform of Parliament* on the plan of universal suffrage and annual election, but in a total overthrow of all existing establishments, and in a division of the landed, and extinction of the funded property of the country.

This hope and prospect of spoliation have been actively and industriously propagated by several Societies, openly existing in the metropolis, distinguished by the name of *Spenceans*; a title which they have assumed in consequence of having revived the principles, with some variation, of a visionary writer of the name of *Spence*, which first appeared in a publication of his near twenty years ago.

It appears that at some of these Societies, held during the last month, the question was discussed, whether the meetings for Parliamentary Reform were calculated to mislead or enlighten the public. In the course of the debates upon which question, it was strongly urged "that Parliamentary Reform was only an half measure, that they must look to the

" land, for nothing short of that would ever avail them: that we had no Constitution, there being no book in which it could be found, nor any man that could tell what it was." In another discussion upon the question, "Whether the practical establishment of *Spence's* plan be an effectual remedy for the present distresses," one of the doctrines maintained was, that "the land-holder was a monster to be hunted down; but that they should not suffer themselves to be amused; that there was a greater evil, namely, the fund-holder; that these were the rapacious wretches, that took fifteen pence out of every quartre loaf."

It further appears, that in these meetings the most blasphemous expressions and doctrines are openly and repeatedly advanced; that as the meetings are professed to be of a convivial nature, the political debates and readings are usually followed by songs, in many of which the most inflammatory topics are introduced, some of a seditious and treasonable nature, and others under the form of profane and indecent parodies of the Liturgy and of the holy Scriptures.

These Societies appear to have extended themselves; and there are traces of the existence of a Committee called *Conservative*, directing the operations of the whole. The doctrines above mentioned have been systematically and industriously disseminated amongst mechanics and manufacturers, discharged soldiers and sailors, and labourers of all descriptions: they have been inculcated at frequent appointed meetings, and at various places, by speakers, who have made the distresses of the times topics of excitement and inflammation; and they have been circulated, with incredible activity and perseverance, in cheap and often gratuitous publications. It has been proved, to the entire satisfaction of your Committee, that some members of these Societies, acting by delegated or assumed authority, as an executive Committee of the whole, conceived the project, and endeavoured to prepare the means of raising an insurrection, so formidable from numbers, as by dint of physical strength to overpower all resistance.

The first step towards the accomplishment of this object was, by the individual exertion of the members of the Committee, to discover and foment the prevalent distresses and discontents in the metropolis and its vicinity. Returns were made of

those who they thought were to be relied upon for daring and hazardous enterprizes.

The design was by a sudden rising in the dead of the night, to surprise and overpower the soldiers in their different barracks, which were to be set on fire; at the same time (plans having been arranged, and some steps taken, with a view to the accomplishment of that object) to possess themselves of the artillery, to seize or destroy the bridges, and to take possession of the Tower and the Bank. In furtherance of this design, a machine was projected for clearing the streets of cavalry. A drawing of this machine, fully authenticated, and also a manuscript sketch or plan of various important parts of the Tower, found with the drawing of the machine, have been laid before your Committee.

This design was, however, relinquished a short time before its intended execution. It was thought more prudent previously to ascertain what force the Conspirators could actually call together, and this it was agreed could best be done by convening a public meeting, for the ostensible purpose of obtaining a redress of grievances in a legal way. The map of London was inspected, and Spa Fields were selected as the most eligible spot, from their vicinity to the Bank and the Tower. Advertisements were accordingly prepared, and written placards circulated, of the most dangerous and inflammatory nature; of one of which the following is a copy:

"BRITONS, TO ARMS!"

"The whole country waits the signal from London to fly to Arms! Haste, break open gunsmiths and other likely places to find arms! Run all constables who touch a man of us; no rise of bread; no Regent; no Castlereagh, off with their heads; no placemen, tythes, or enclosures; no taxes; no bishops, only useless lumber! Stand true, or be slaves for ever."

"N. B. Five thousand of these bills are up in the town, and printed ones, with further particulars, will appear in due time."

At this time, if not before, the intended insurrection assumed the symbols of the French Revolution; a Committee of Public Safety, consisting of 24, was agreed upon, including the names of several persons, extremely unlikely to lend themselves to such a cause. A tricolour flag and cockades were actually prepared; the flag was openly carried and displayed

at the first meeting which took place in Spa Fields on the 15th of November. No acts of violence were, however, encouraged on that day, though some few instances of plunder occurred after the assembly dispersed, *but care was taken to adjourn the meeting to the 2d of December, by which time it was hoped that the preparations for insurrection would be fully matured.* Not a moment was lost in advertising the next meeting, and great assiduity was employed in circulating the intelligence through all the great manufacturing towns in the country, by means of placards and hand-bills; endeavours were used to raise subscriptions; the expense hitherto incurred in forwarding the object of the Conspiracy, and in supporting such inferior members of it as had relinquished their trades and occupations in order to devote their whole time to the furtherance of the cause, having been hitherto principally defrayed by one individual of the Committee. Plans for the seduction of the soldiers were now adopted and pursued with unremitting activity; appeals were made to excite their sympathy, and induce them not to act against the insurgents; attempts were made to inflame their hopes by promises of rank and reward, and to alarm their jealousy by the absurd fiction of the actual landing of a considerable foreign army, for the purpose of controlling them.

The barracks were again reconnoitred with a view to attack. The manufacture of tri-color-ribbon was encouraged, with a view of rendering it familiar to the eyes of the public.

Visits were repeated to those quarters of the town, where the distress was considered as the most prevalent; and warehouses along the river, as well as shops in other places, which were known to contain arms, combustibles, and clothing, were examined and noted down, with the view of seizing those articles on the proper occasion. Plans were also formed for seducing the sailors on the river, by offers of advancement to high rank under the new government, and for seizing and equipping such ships as were accessible. Immediately previous to the day of meeting, arms were provided for the immediate use of some of the persons most actively engaged. This provision was deemed sufficient for the beginning of the insurrection, as they felt confident that if it should be successful for two hours, as many arms might be procured as would be necessary, from the depots and gunsmiths'

shops, which had been reconnoitred with that view.

Your Committee have further received undoubted information that a large quantity of pike-heads had been ordered of one individual, and 250 actually made by him, and delivered and paid for. It was also undoubtedly intended to liberate the prisoners in the principal gaols in or about the Metropolis, in the hope of their concurrence and assistance in the intended insurrection. Addresses were introduced into some of those prisons, and recommended to be communicated to others, in which the persons confined were invited, in the name of the tri-colored Committee, to rally round the tri-colored standard, which would be erected on Monday, December the 2d, and to wear tri-colored cockades themselves. It was promised that the prisoners should be liberated by force, and arms were stated to be provided for them, and they were directed to be ready to assist in over-powering the turkeys. A waggon was hired for the business of the day, in which the flags and banner or standard, which had been previously prepared, together with some ammunition, were secretly conveyed to the place of meeting. From this waggon, before the *ostensible business* of the day commenced, in the other part of the field, the most inflammatory speeches were delivered, tending directly to excite insurrection, concluded by an appeal to the multitude assembled, whether they were prepared to redress their own grievances. A tri-colored cockade was then exhibited, and the tri-color flag was displayed, and a number of persons followed it out of the field.

The direction which they took was towards that part of the town previously designed; gunsmiths' shops were broken open, addresses and offers were made to the soldiers at the Tower to induce them to open the gates; *but from the failure of the numbers expected to join the insurgents, no attempt was made to force the gates.* An attack was however made upon the City Magistrates assembled in the Royal Exchange, a shot fired, and a tri-color flag and cockade openly displayed and seized on the offender.

In reviewing the whole of the transactions of the 2d of December, your Committee are firmly persuaded, that, however improbable the success of such a plan may appear, it yet was deliberately premeditated by desperate men, who calculated without reasonable ground upon

defection of their opposers; and upon active support from those multitudes, whose distress they had witnessed, and whom they had vainly instigated to revolt. That consequently it was not merely the sudden ebullition of the moment, or the unauthorized attempt of any unconnected individual.

Your Committee are further convinced, that notwithstanding the failure on the 2d of December, the same designs still continue to be prosecuted with sanguine hopes of success.

Your Committee having thus stated the general result of the evidence which has been laid before them, respecting the state of the Metropolis, have now the no less painful duty of calling the attention of the House to what has been passing during the same period in different parts of the country, a subject of equally momentous consideration. The first thing which has here forced itself upon their observation, is the widely diffused ramification of a *system of Clubs*, associated professedly for the purpose of Parliamentary Reform, upon the most extended principle of *universal suffrage* and *annual parliaments*. These Clubs in general designate themselves by the same name of *Hampden Clubs*. On the professed object of their institution, they appear to be in communication and connection with the Club of that name in London.

It appears to be part of the system of these Clubs, to promote an extension of clubs of the same name and nature, so widely, as, if possible, to include every village in the kingdom. The leading members are active in the circulation of publications likely to promote their object. Petitions, ready prepared, have been sent down from the metropolis to all Societies in the country disposed to receive them. The communication between these Clubs takes place by the mission of delegates; delegates from these Clubs in the country, have assembled in London, and are expected to assemble again early in March. Whatever may be the real object of these Clubs in general, your Committee have no hesitation in stating, from information on which they place full reliance, that in far the greater number of them, and particularly in those which are established in the great manufacturing districts of Lancashire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire, and which are composed of the lower order of artizans, *nothing short of a Revolution is the object expected and avowed.*

Your Committee find, from equally undoubted information, that the doctrines of the *Speneean Clubs* have been widely diffused through the country, either by the extension of *similar societies*, or more frequently by the intervention of *missionaries* or *delegates*, whose business it is to propagate those doctrines throughout every society to which they have access. It is the universal practice of these Societies, to require from the members a small weekly subscription, which provides a fund for the expences of these missionaries, and also for the purchase of seditious tracts, which are read and commented on at their meetings. Some of these tracts, now before your Committee, inculcate in the most artful manner, the necessity of overturning what they call "*The Privileged Class*," as distinguished from the people, who are described as consisting of labourers, artizans, tradesmen, and every profession useful to society. A new order is declared to be the will of the people; rebellion is justified by the assertion that a nation cannot be a rebel; and all religion is disavowed, as well as loyalty, by the assertion, in answer to the question, "Would you live "without Gods or Kings"—" We abjure "tyranny of every kind."

It seems, indeed, to be a part of the system adopted by these Societies, to prepare the minds of the people for the destruction of the present frame of society, by undermining not only their habits of decent and regular subordination, but all the principles of morality and religion. Your Committee find, that there is scarcely any very numerous Society, in the parts above referred to, of whose proceedings they have obtained an account, in which some of the leading speakers do not openly avow the most seditious opinions, and do not excite their hearers to be prepared for actual insurrection. Topics for discussion are selected with this view; amongst others, the question, whether the Jacobin or the Loyalist was the best friend to his country? Even where petitioning is recommended, it is proposed to be conducted in such a manner, by an immense number of delegates attending in London at the same time, in several parties, attached to each petition, as might induce an effort to obtain by force whatever they demanded. A general idea seems prevalent among those who compose these Societies, that some fixed day, at no very great distance, is to be appointed for a *general rising*. They have been taught to look to the meetings

in London as the signal for their operations, and have been in the habit of adjourning their own assemblies simultaneously to the same day; and it is a lamentable instance of the common interest which they feel, if not of the connection which is formed with those most implicated in the outrages committed in the metropolis, that about Manchester and some other places, the greatest exultation was manifested previous to the meeting in Spa-fields on the 2d of December; and the taking of the Tower and the ruin of the Bank were *publicly and confidently predicted*. The news of the result was impatiently expected, the roads were crowded during the night with a number of persons, many of them delegates from the different societies in the country, waiting for the arrival of the mail coach, and the disappointment was not concealed, when it was ascertained that the riot had been quelled without much serious or extensive mischief.

It appears, that the *confidence of the disaffected* is such, that they represent the numbers enrolled as amounting to several hundred thousand, and that their Societies are daily increasing; that in their lists they distinguish by particular marks those among their subscribers who are able-bodied men, and ready to act when required; and that they also keep a list of those who refuse to join them in what they call a "*Black Book*," and threaten vengeance against these persons when the general insurrection shall take place. In some parts of one populous county, where nearly every village has already its *Hampden Club*, the members make it no secret that they consider themselves as of no other use than as being ready to act whenever they are called upon; on their admission they are said to be listed, and receive a secret card with the words "*Be Ready, Be Steady.*"

The habits and manners of these persons seem entirely changed; they already calculate upon a share of land which each is to possess, and point out the destruction of the churches, as the necessary consequence of their success. It appears that preparations are in progress, in several places, for providing arms; the demand upon gunsmiths, for every species of fire arms, has been beyond all former example; the intention is professed, of having recourse for a still larger supply to those towns where arms are manufactured, and where they are to be obtained at a very low rate, from the general cheapness of labour at this time; or in case of neces-

sity they are to be seized by force. The facility of converting implements of husbandry into offensive weapons, has been suggested; and persons have been sent to observe the state of particular places, where depôts of arms for the public service were supposed to have been formed.

Your Committee find, that a system of secret association has been extended to the manufacturing population of Glasgow and some other populous towns of Scotland; and although these societies have availed themselves of the same pretext, of *Parliamentary Reform on the broadest basis*, your Committee are firmly persuaded, from the information which has been laid before them, that their ultimate object is the overthrow by force of the existing form of Government. That the time for attempting this enterprize was to depend on the simultaneous rising of the disaffected in England; with some emissaries from whom occasional intercourse appears to have taken place, and that some provision of weapons has been made by this association.

Your Committee have now submitted to the House, what they conceive to be a fair, and not exaggerated statement of the result of their investigation. They have thought themselves precluded from inserting, in an appendix, the information from which it is drawn, by the consideration, that unless it were extremely partial and incomplete, they could not make it public without hazarding the personal safety of many useful and many respectable individuals, and in some instances without prejudicing the due administration of public justice.

On a review of the whole, it is a great satisfaction to your Committee to observe, that, notwithstanding the alarming progress which has been made in the system of extending disaffection and secret societies, its success has been confined to the

principal manufacturing districts, where the distress is more prevalent, and numbers more easily collected: and that even in many of these districts, privations have been borne with exemplary patience and resignation, and the attempts of the disaffected have been disappointed; that few if any of the higher orders or even of the middle class of society, and scarcely any of the agricultural population have lent themselves to the more violent of these projects. Great allowance must be made for those who, under the pressure of urgent distress, have been led to listen to plausible and confident demagogues, in the expectation of immediate relief. It is to be hoped, that many of those who have engaged, to a certain extent, in the projects of the disaffected, but in whom the principles of moral and religious duty have not been extinguished or perverted by the most profane and miserable sophistry, would withdraw themselves before those projects were pushed to actual insurrection.

But, with all these allowances, your Committee cannot contemplate the activity and arts of the leaders in this conspiracy, and the numbers whom they have already seduced, and may seduce; the oaths by which many of them are bound together; the means suggested and prepared for the forcible attainment of their objects; the nature of the objects themselves, which are not only the overthrow of all the political institutions of the kingdom, but also such a subversion of the rights and principles of property, as must necessarily lead to general confusion, plunder, and bloodshed; without submitting, to the most serious attention of the House, the dangers which exist, and which the utmost vigilance of Government, under the existing laws, has been found inadequate to prevent.

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